

# Final Report

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[www.buildinghome.ca](http://www.buildinghome.ca)

Building Home - Impacts of a Housing First model for Youth who  
Experience Mental Illness and Housing Instability



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# Acknowledgements

First and foremost, to the youth who partnered on this project, your willingness to take charge of your narratives and advocate for better youth housing solutions is powerful. You have all given voice to so many experiences that often go unheard. We will never forget that strength.



# Acknowledgements

Much appreciation goes out to the Building Home Team and all of our community partners for such an inspiring collaborative experience. Our ability to work together, learn together, and create together is foundational in bringing this project to life and supporting such a strong platform for youth voice.



# Acknowledgements

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# Summary



Through the Building Home project, youth have taken charge of their narratives and transformed their experiences into a life-sized art installation that advocates for better housing solutions for youth.

A team of artists, youth with lived expertise, case managers, researchers, and facilitators all came together and used artistic expression to transform the underrepresented housing journeys youth experience in the city.

We began with a series of interviews with youth to understand their experiences of a Housing First program. From there, the information was analyzed and the themes that emerged were used in a design process with a transdisciplinary project team that included youth. This iterative design process made way for rich and meaningful representation of the core themes that youth felt were important to share with their communities. These themes spoke to existing challenges in system navigation and the impact of housing precarity/homelessness on youths' ability to thrive.

# Summary



Further, these themes highlight a need for youth housing programs/services to recognize and support the unique needs of each youth, including the need for agency, independence, mentorship, and social connection. Youth also made it clear that accessing safe and stable housing is not always the end of the journey. It takes time to settle in and build stability and trust.

The installation exhibit launched in November 2023 and was a focal point of the 2023 National Housing Day events in Saint John, NB. Responses from a feedback survey indicated the experience of the exhibit was a powerful platform for reflection and learning. Many respondents pointed to the immersive and emotional elements of the installation, often acknowledging new insights on the realities that exist for unhoused youth.

In all, Building Home was a powerful experience that acknowledges housing as a right, and invites us all to join the conversation.



# Sommaire



Dans le cadre du projet Building Home, les jeunes ont pris en charge leurs récits. Ils ont transformé leurs expériences en une installation artistique grandeur nature qui milite en faveur de meilleures solutions de logement pour les jeunes

Une équipe d'artistes, de jeunes ayant une expérience vécue, de gestionnaires de cas, de chercheurs et de facilitateurs s'est mobilisée et a utilisé l'expression artistique pour transformer les parcours de logement que vivent les jeunes sous-représentés dans la ville.

Nous avons commencé par une série d'entrevues avec des jeunes afin de comprendre leur expérience du programme Logement d'abord. L'information a par la suite été analysée. Les thèmes qui en sont ressortis ont été utilisés dans un processus de conception avec une équipe de projet transdisciplinaire qui comprenait des jeunes. Ce processus itératif de conception a permis d'obtenir une représentation riche et significative des thèmes fondamentaux que les jeunes trouvaient important de présenter à leurs collectivités.



# Sommaire



Ces thèmes portaient sur les défis existants en matière d'orientation dans le système et l'incidence de la précarité du logement/de l'itinérance sur la capacité à s'épanouir des jeunes.

De plus, ces thèmes soulignaient que les programmes/services de logement destinés aux jeunes doivent reconnaître et soutenir les besoins uniques de chaque jeune, notamment le besoin d'avoir un sentiment de contrôle et d'autonomie et le besoin de mentorat et de liens sociaux. Les jeunes ont également clairement indiqué que l'accès à un logement sûr et stable ne représente pas toujours la fin du parcours. Il faut du temps pour s'établir et bâtir la stabilité et la confiance.

L'exposition a été lancée en novembre 2023. Elle a été un des points centraux des événements de la Journée nationale de l'habitation de 2023 à Saint John, au Nouveau-Brunswick.

Les réponses à un sondage ont indiqué que l'expérience vécue à l'exposition a été une puissante plateforme de réflexion et d'apprentissage.

# Sommaire



De nombreux répondants ont souligné les éléments immersifs et émotionnels de l'installation, reconnaissant souvent les nouvelles réalités des jeunes sans logement.

Dans l'ensemble, Building Home a été une expérience puissante. Elle reconnaissait le logement comme un droit et nous invitait tous à prendre part à la conversation.

# Introduction

## Defining The Problem

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Youth who experience homelessness are often underrepresented and their unique needs are missed in provincial conversations around housing solutions. According to a study by Gaetz et al. (2016), 20% of the homeless population in Canada are youth between the ages of 13-24 years.

Once unhoused, youth are at higher risk of experiencing traumatic events that may impact their mental health (Cook et al., 2018; Davies & Allen, 2017; Gaetz, 2004; Schwan, 2017). The stigma associated with homelessness also negatively impacts youth mental health (Kidd, 2007). In addition, the earlier youth experience housing precarity, the more likely they are to have multiple episodes of homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2016).

Further, studies indicate that involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS) is linked to a higher risk of homelessness in youth (Bonakdar, et al., 2023). A lack of transitional support for youth exiting care is highlighted as one of the common challenges that contributes to youth homelessness (Bender et al., 2015; Bonakdar, 2023).

With all this in mind, it is imperative that housing solutions consider the unique developmental stage of youth and learn how to support these needs effectively.

# Introduction

## A Brief Look at Housing First Solutions

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Research suggests that Housing First programs positively impact mental health and housing stability with adults who live with severe mental illness and histories of housing precarity (Aubry et al., 2015; Chung et al., 2017; Stergiopoulos et al., 2019). The successful implementation of Housing First programs with adult populations across Canada has led service providers and researchers to start the process of adapting Housing First programming to the needs of precariously housed and homeless youth (see Gaetz et al., 2021).

The Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) approach operates through five basic principles (Gaetz et al., 2021):

- Housing is a right and, therefore, not contingent on enrollment in other forms of programming, such as education, employment, or preconditions, such as sobriety
- Youth agency and choice is respected
- Youth wellness is supported through optional programming and services, offered in conjunction with housing
- Individualization of supports and services are prioritized and tailored to the unique needs of youth
- Community engagement and belonging are promoted

# Introduction

## A Brief Look at Housing First Solutions

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Although HF4Y has become best practice, more research is needed on how this approach impacts youth experiences of housing and mental health. A recent systematic review (Woodhall-Melnik et al., Under Review) of HF4Y finds that the evidence base on outcomes for youth enrolled in Housing First is small and more work must be done to determine which types of programming are most suitable for youth. Nevertheless, HF4Y remains a viable option for providing housing to youth who face housing insecurity and homelessness.

# Introduction

## Context

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A recently established Housing First program for youth in New Brunswick is a collaboration between multiple community agencies. The program follows a Housing First approach in that youth are provided with subsidized congregate or scattered-site housing units, without preconditions. This means that housing is not dependent on enrollment in other programming such as education, employment, or addictions/mental health treatment.

Further, youth are connected with housing case managers who offer individualized supports that meet youth where they are at and are focused on the priority needs that youth express. In an effort to better understand the housing experiences of youth in this program, we launched the Building Home project.

The Building Home project was initiated based on two identified gaps:

- A lack of information on how youth experience Housing First approaches
- A need to support youth from a Housing First program who were seeking platforms to meaningfully contribute their lived expertise to strengthening community understanding of youth housing journeys.

# Introduction

## Research Questions and Project Goals

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Our research questions developed from the above context and are as follows:

- How do youth in a Housing First program experience housing and mental health?
- What elements are impactful in the participatory knowledge translation process?
- How can youth engagement in Participatory Action Research (PAR) shape community members' views of youth housing and mental health?

Our primary objective was to work with youth in the Housing First program to understand the underlying mechanisms that impact their experiences of housing and mental health.

Our secondary objective was to engage youth in advocacy by translating the findings from the youth interviews into an art installation. This installation was created alongside youth and advocates for better housing options for themselves and their peers.



# Introduction

## Research Questions and Project Goals

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Our third objective was to reduce community stigma toward youth who are unstably housed or unhoused. The installation was shared with the general public in Saint John, New Brunswick and will continue to be offered at other locations in New Brunswick over the coming year. The reaction of community members was documented through an online survey. The responses from this survey were analyzed to provide an understanding of the general public's reaction to the installation and its impacts on their perceptions of youth homelessness.

In all, this project promotes housing as a basic need and a human right. It highlights the importance of understanding the experiences of youth who struggle with homelessness and housing precarity. It leverages our partnerships to promote youth voice and, through the voices and experiences of youth, calls for higher standards for youth housing and support programs.

# Methodology

## Summary of Our Approach

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The Building Home project is a participatory action research (PAR) project that amplifies youth voices by inviting community to journey through a life-sized art installation.

Building Home is a transdisciplinary project that brings together teams of artists, housing case managers, youth with lived expertise, researchers, and facilitators. Each of these teams on the project were involved in the iterative process of sense making and knowledge mobilization. Through strong collaborative partnerships with community agencies, youth, and researchers alike, we were able to bring together these five different forms of expertise. This is one of the hallmark features of this project and made room for rich critical dialogue and an explosion of creative expression that really made way for these youth narratives to come to life.

We used a PAR methodology as this framework promotes engagement with underserved youth as active and equal partners in the creation of knowledge (Kidd et al., 2018). The PAR research design holds capacity for shared decision-making, perspective taking, personal growth, and a focus on process (Kidd & Mkral, 2005). These qualities increase our ability to respond to the needs of youth for stronger and more meaningful engagement in the project (Karabanow & Nalor, 2015).

# Methodology

## Summary of Our Approach

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Echoing the foundations of PAR, the themes that emerged from the team's post-debrief illustrate how this project took a rigorous approach to a highly flexible and creative process.

### Prioritizing Process

It's all about relationship building, building trust, and being flexible enough to respond effectively to the context.

### Transdisciplinary

A transdisciplinary model that invites each team member to engage in each other's expertise in order to explore the research questions and bring the project purpose to life.

### Emphasis on Learning

Staying curious and open to new perspectives. This is done by recognizing the importance of reflection time, both individually and as a team.

### Sharing of Power

Agreeing on shared vision and recognizing each other's expertise. Understanding that we can action ideas with collaborative contributions.

# Methodology

## Summary of Our Approach

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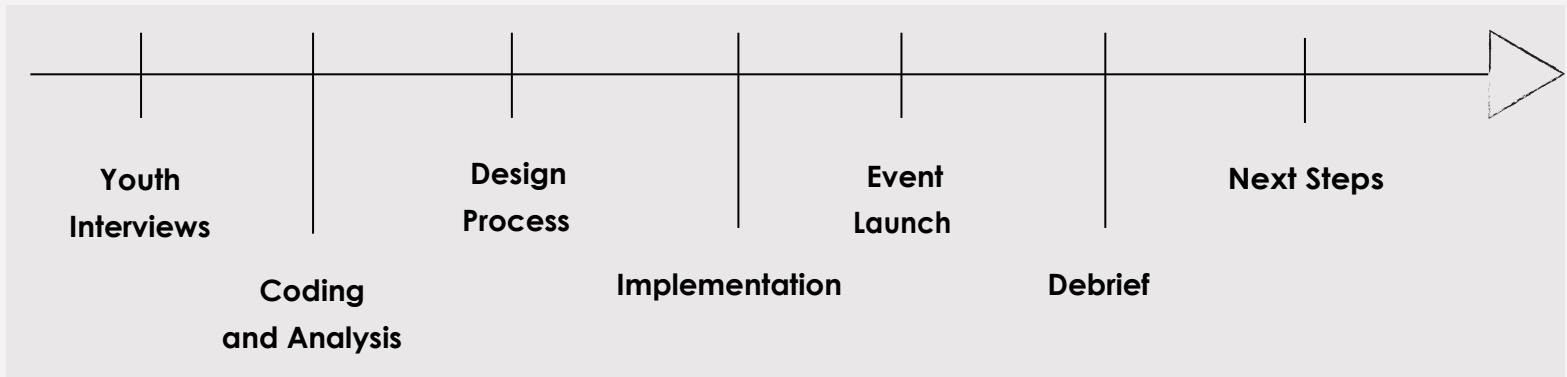
### Creative Expression

Value is placed on expressing ideas through a variety of artistic mediums that engages the senses and creates an immersive experience. Staying open to trying new things

### Amplifying Youth Voice

Staying true to what youth are expressing while considering the ethical implications of sharing narratives publicly. Actively listening to youth perspective and ensuring there is open and honest dialogue with youth where they feel comfortable to challenge ideas and see their contributions being valued and brought to life.

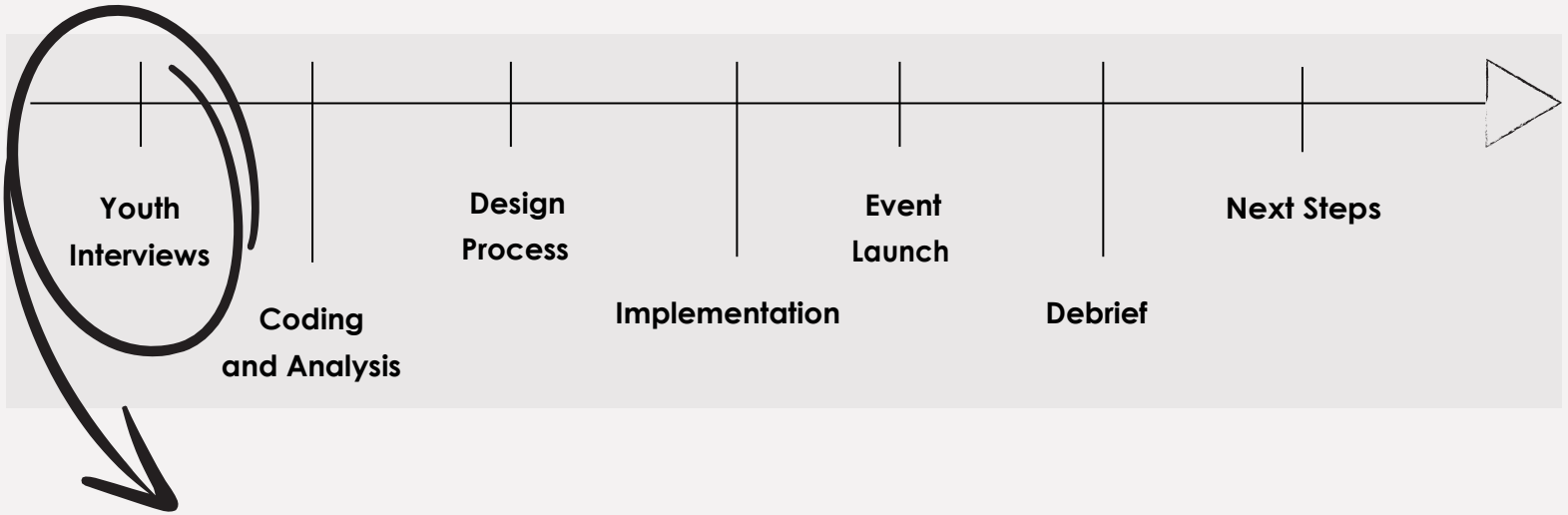
# Step-By-Step Process



This project occurred in two phases. Our first phase focused on interviewing youth in a Housing First program to capture their experiences. In the second phase, funded by CMHC, we analyzed the interview data and worked with the findings of our analysis to create a life-sized art installation. The key themes used to create the installation were highlighted by youth through a series of member-checking activities and touchpoints where youth were able to provide feedback on the thematic analysis and further contribute to our understanding of their experiences.

The following summarizes how the Building Home team (BH team) worked through each step of the project.

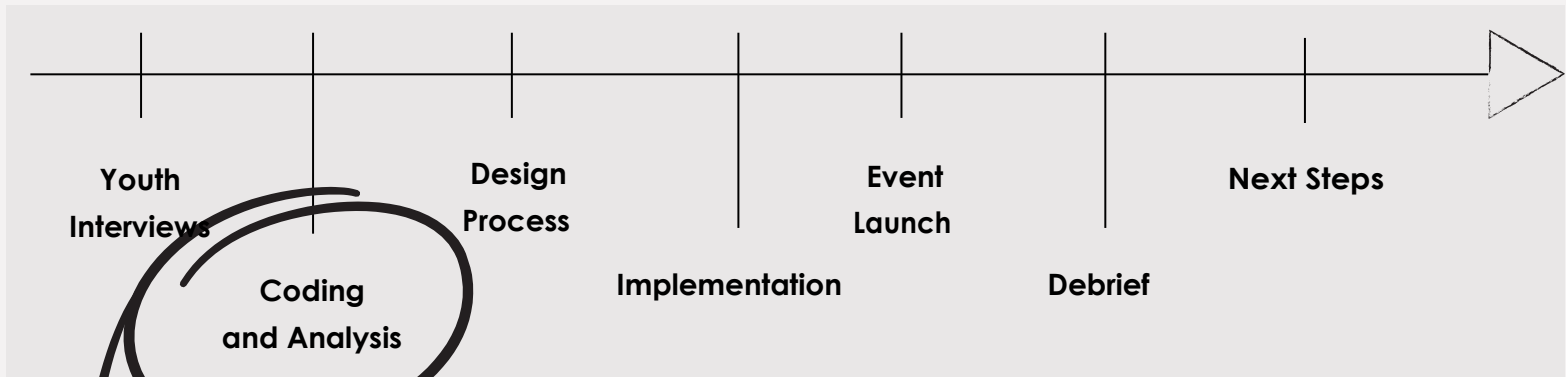
# Step-By-Step Process



One-on-one interviews were conducted with 16 youth from a Housing First program for youth. Youth were asked about their lives both before and after they received housing through this program. In addition, youth were invited to summarize their narratives through a storyboard diagram. These storyboards welcomed youth to express their thoughts and experiences through writing and/or drawing.

In order for these interviews to occur, a strong collaborative and trusting relationship was established between the research team and the multiple community agencies that run the housing program. Through this collaboration, a member of the research team scheduled blocks of time to be onsite every week for a period of 2 months so that it was easier to meet with youth when they were ready. This level of flexibility was necessary to prioritize youth's time, comfort, and experience with the interview.

# Step-By-Step Process

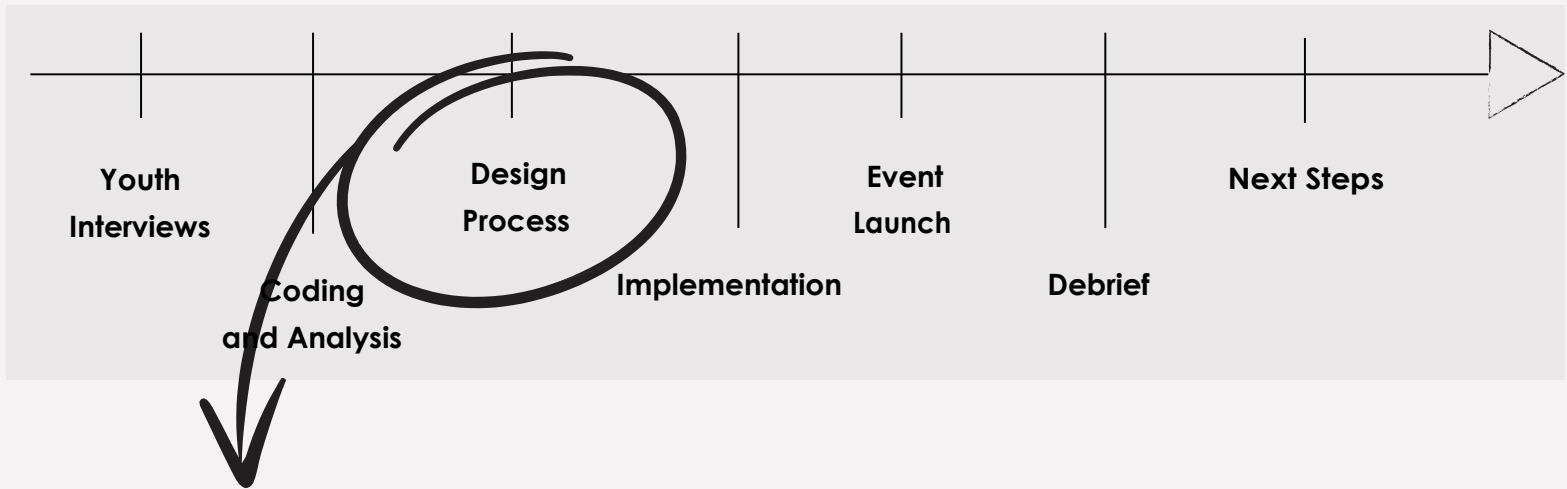


Through qualitative thematic analysis (Burnard, 1991) of these interview transcripts, we produced a summary report of the themes that emerged from the narratives youth shared with us.

These themes were shared with youth throughout the iterative design process. Youth provided their thoughts on these themes and contributed to creative discussions on how to best represent these themes. This served as a form of member checking and ensured that the analysis and the creative representations accurately captured the experiences and realities of the youth (Candela, 2019).



# Step-By-Step Process



The design process captured the pivotal feedback loop between the BH team and the themes from the initial youth interviews that ultimately led to the design of the installation and the intended experience it provided.

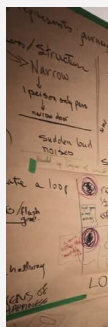
We will take a closer look at the design process in the following section.



Youth Input



Review Analysis



Journey Mapping



Youth Input

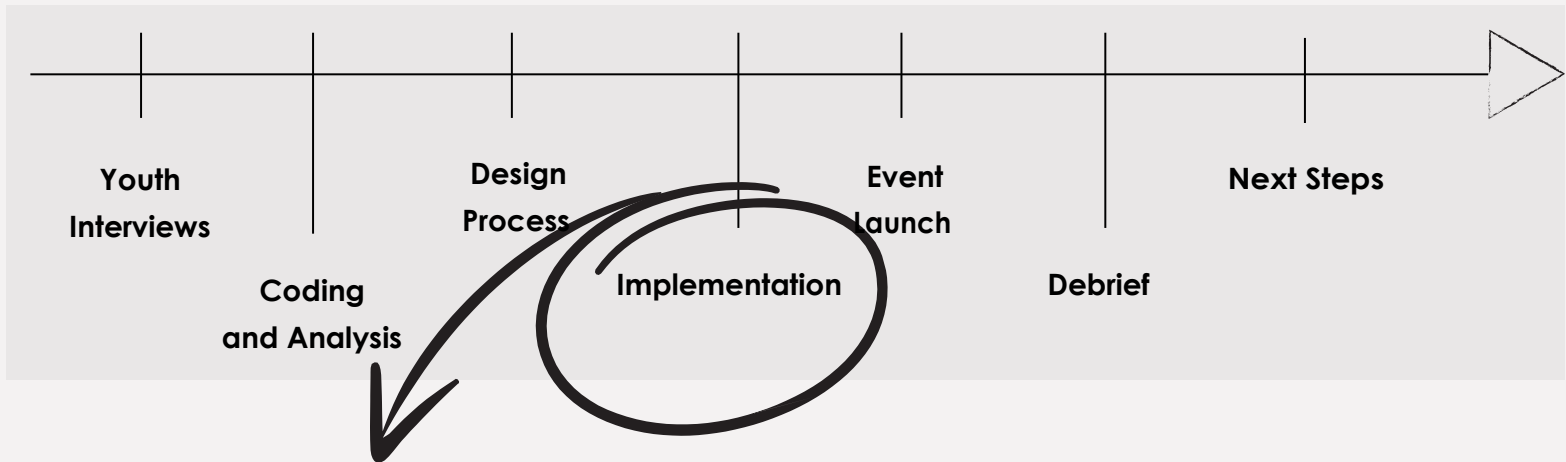


Mock Floor-plan



Youth Input

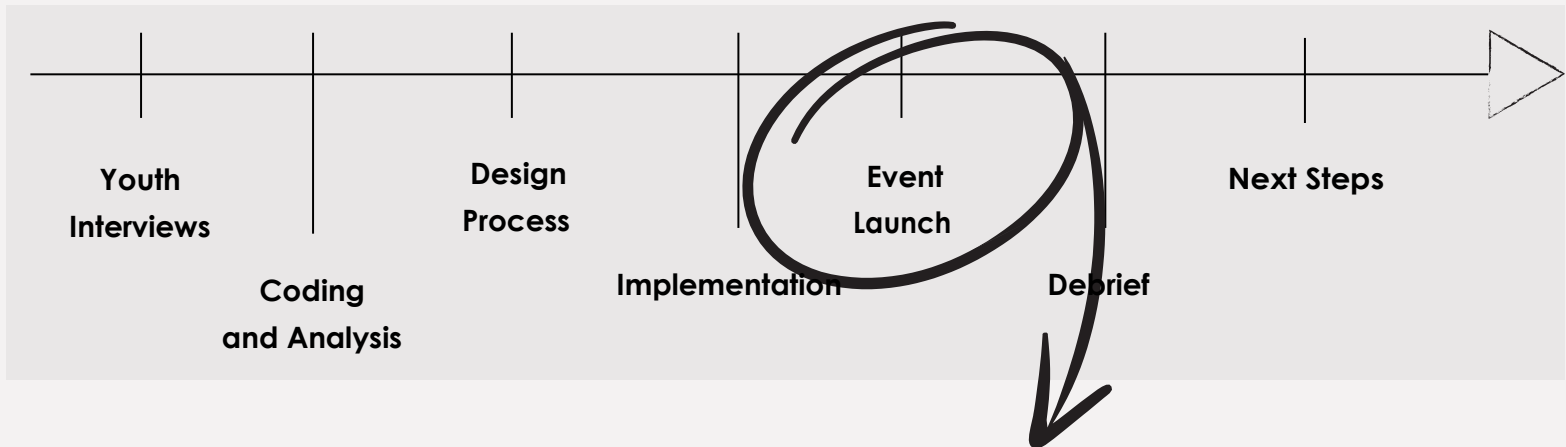
# Step-By-Step Process



The physical build of the installation was done over the course of four weeks and prioritized engagement and flexibility. The majority of the physical elements were put together at community locations where youth often attend. This enabled opportunity for youth to jump in and out of the building process when they had time and provide any feedback throughout the process.

An important element of this process was the website creation and social media promotion. This enabled us to document this project's process in a way that can be shared with community members and build excitement for the event launch.

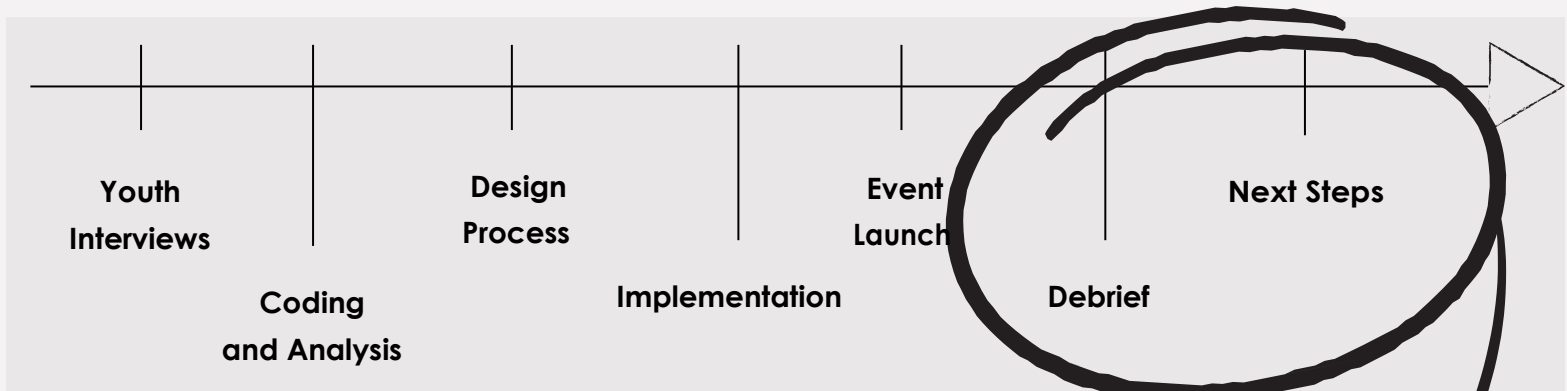
# Step-By-Step Process



We partnered with the HOME-RL research lab to be part of their Annual National Housing Day events. This year, in order to draw attention to the voices of the youth, the events were centered on youth housing. This created a strong platform for youth advocacy and promoted engagement with the installation. The installation launched November 21st 2023 and remained open to the public until November 29th 2023

Prior to public launch, we had a final private walkthrough for youth on the project, which allowed them to be the first ones to experience the installation. By request, attendance was limited to the youth, their guests, the case managers that were a part of the BH team, and the project lead. This ensured a private viewing where youth could give final feedback on smaller details, and had space to have an honest response to the representation of their housing journeys. Smaller details, such as putting a sleeping bag on the floor instead of on a bed, to make the bed look a little more “lived in”, adding a journal with written thoughts that still haunt people even after stable housing is secured, moving the tissues on the bed, and many other small details were identified during this pre-launch event.

# Step-By-Step Process



The BH project team debriefed the whole experience one week after the end of the launch event. This informal discussion highlighted the meaningful components of the project's approach.

With so much interest from the event launch, the BH team was able to confirm two other exhibition tours around the province, making this a traveling exhibit.

## 22 Building Home

Running but Never Moving

AFTER HOUSING

The Gift of Time is a Double Edged Sword

Fresh Start

**The Complexity of Consciousness**

- The Nature of Consciousness**
  - What is consciousness?
    - the state of being aware of and responding to one's surroundings
    - the ability to experience, think, feel, and perceive
    - the state of being aware of one's own thoughts and feelings
  - Is consciousness a single entity or a collection of processes?
    - the idea that consciousness is a single entity is called **monism**
    - the idea that consciousness is a collection of processes is called **pluralism**
  - How does consciousness arise?
    - the idea that consciousness arises from the physical processes of the brain is called **reductive physicalism**
    - the idea that consciousness arises from non-physical processes is called **non-reductive physicalism**
    - the idea that consciousness arises from a combination of physical and non-physical processes is called **interactionism**
- The Role of Consciousness**
  - What is the role of consciousness in the human mind?
    - consciousness is the seat of **reason** and **logic**
    - consciousness is the seat of **emotion** and **feeling**
    - consciousness is the seat of **will** and **choice**
  - How does consciousness influence behavior?
    - consciousness can influence behavior by **providing information** about the environment
    - consciousness can influence behavior by **providing motivation** to act
    - consciousness can influence behavior by **providing feedback** on the results of actions
- The Structure of Consciousness**
  - What is the structure of consciousness?
    - consciousness is a **hierarchy** of processes
    - consciousness is a **continuum** of states
    - consciousness is a **network** of connections
  - How does the structure of consciousness change over time?
    - consciousness changes over time as a result of **learning** and **experience**
    - consciousness changes over time as a result of **development** and **maturation**
    - consciousness changes over time as a result of **environmental factors** and **social interactions**
- The Function of Consciousness**
  - What is the function of consciousness?
    - consciousness is the **source** of **thought** and **action**
    - consciousness is the **medium** of **communication** and **interaction**
    - consciousness is the **arena** of **experience** and **reflection**
  - How does the function of consciousness change over time?
    - consciousness changes over time as a result of **learning** and **experience**
    - consciousness changes over time as a result of **development** and **maturation**
    - consciousness changes over time as a result of **environmental factors** and **social interactions**

## 23 Building Home

# Design Process



## Journey Mapping

The artists led the BH team through a journey mapping activity based on the analysis review. This helped to draw out some of the more abstract ideas and show youth what it would be like to translate these ideas into an experience that can be shared with others.



## Youth Input on Journey Mapping

Youth were led through the journey map drawing and invited to give feedback on the main messaging, and brainstorm creative ways to represent different elements of their journeys.



# Design Process



**Mock Floorplan**

The artists took the journey mapping and translated it into a 3D mock up of the whole installation. The mock-up was designed to scale and mini props of the focal elements that corresponded to each room were included.



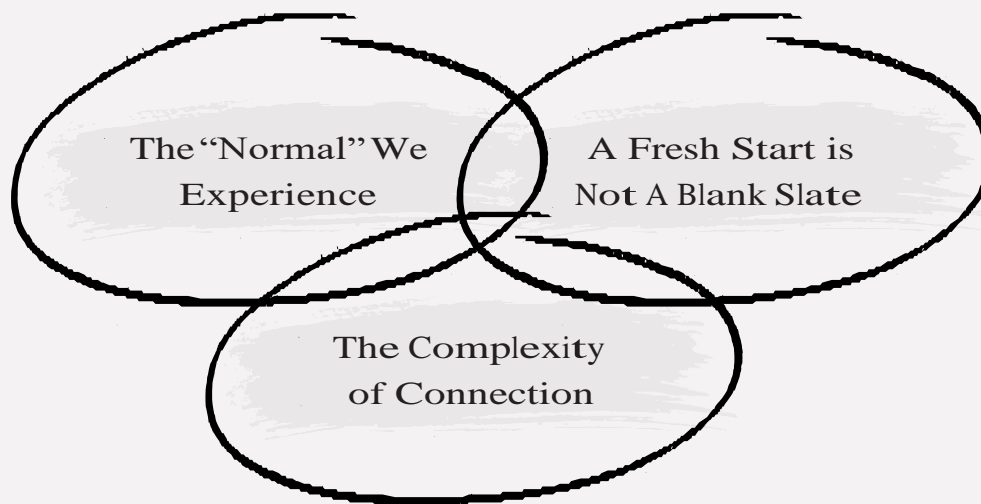
**Youth Input on Mock Floorplan**

Youth gave feedback on the design of the mock-up space, the intended flow of traffic, and the details they foresaw being important to include.

# Key Findings

## Key Themes - Youth Data

Through our design process, youth guided our understanding of what elements were most important to highlight through the installation. Three key themes emerged through our design process with the BH team and provided guidance throughout the creation of the installation.



The following is a summary of the thematic journey that youth felt important to share with their communities about what their experiences have been like navigating housing precarity/homelessness.

# Key Findings

## Thematic Summary

Youth express how the search for safe and stable housing is not straightforward and often involves periods of shuffling through chaos with no real opportunity to thrive. Youth talk about their time on the streets, the countless places they have slept while couchsurfing, and their interactions with government supports.

A strong component of their narratives centered on the cyclical nature of living unhoused and how difficult it is to attain safe and stable housing. More often than not, systemic supports have high barriers and precarious housing options are far more accessible. The associated dangers become familiar, sometimes even making them feel normal. Informal housing options can also sometimes be the only way to stay with their pets, often described as their most important source of connection and belonging.

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*"Chaotic. Just very all over the place, very scared, very fearful of what was next, umm very uncertain, umm uncertain in myself, **just complete spiraling...**"*

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# Key Findings

## Thematic Summary

As youth described their experiences with this cycle, they note the negative impact it has on their sense of self. Youth describe feeling like they have already failed at life, with many of their inner thoughts reinforcing the idea that they are not worthy of housing and cannot do anything about it.

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*"I guess you're literally like I can't go down any more than this like, I'm already living on the streets and it's like a feeling in your chest like **oh I failed at life** or something. [It] really is what it makes you feel like cause you know you're just kinda, I don't know, on the streets"*

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A loss of control, a constant impermanence, a lack of constructive choices, and formal supports that are conditional on program criteria are common threads across the experiences shared in this project.

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*"...taking your, like, **immobilizing these skills** from them again, like you just let them basically learn how to live by themselves just to take it away..."*

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# Key Findings

## Thematic Summary

It is interesting to note that when it comes to youth experiences with government supports around housing, youth acknowledge how their needs for physical safety from violence are met, however, these programs do not seem to meet their emotional and social needs. Many youth describe the program criteria required for service as a barrier to their development and yet another way to fall back into the homelessness cycle.

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*"...if you're willing to listen to them, they're willing to work with you, if you're not willing to follow everything that they want you to follow you're homeless again. And that's the thing with the system, like just 'cause we're stuck in the system **doesn't mean my life becomes the system...**"*

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# Key Findings

## Thematic Summary

As youth remarked, the journey doesn't stop when they find safe and stable housing. Along with a sense of relief, there is also anxiety that comes with having free time that was once taken up by survival activities. A strong need for connection permeates through many of the experiences with housing shared by youth. This is sometimes expressed as a desire to reconnect with family members, let go of relationships that no longer serve them, set healthy boundaries with friends or partners, ensure the safety of their pet, or find ways to build a sense of community around them. As youth settle into their dwellings and build their sense of home, they express wanting support and mentorship from healthy adults, enough flexibility to make mistakes without the threat of losing any of their basic needs, an opportunity to explore their interests and work towards their goals, and support for the independence they carry.

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*"We want support and mentorship, but  
don't want to be robbed of our  
independence"*

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# Key Findings

## Thematic Summary

Youth highlighted the fact that once stably housed, the experiences accumulated while being unhoused do not just disappear. It takes time to trust stability and adapt to it as a new form of normal. Many youth express anxieties around people breaking in while they were sleeping, their belongings being stolen while they were out, their locks being picked, or simply just losing their housing for reasons out of their control. The internalized chaos from living unhoused seems to linger. This is coupled with thoughts of unworthiness that influence feelings of isolation and instability. Taken altogether, youth are expressing a desire for agency, time and support to feel safe and stable, and the ability to learn and grow at their own pace without fear of losing their housing. They express appreciation for supports that provide mentorship, model healthy boundaries and trust, respect their histories and independence, and give them the time they need to heal.

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*"...my brain **doesn't** let me think I can  
**settle** down here"*

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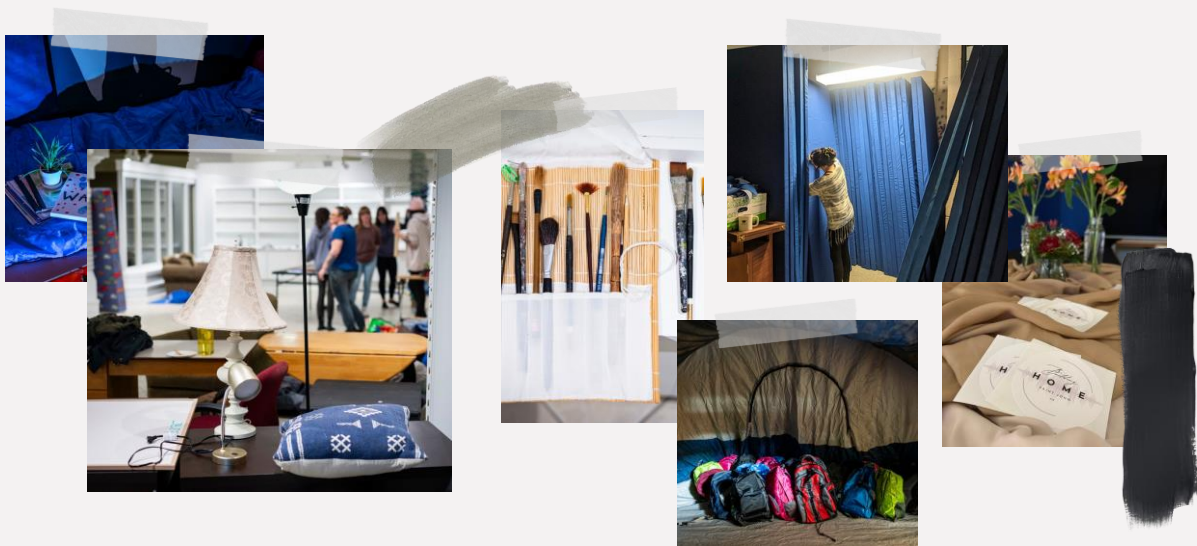


# The Installation

## Overview of Details

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The thematic analysis and design process described above guided the creation of the installation. Each of the five rooms in the installation captured different elements of the themes that youth highlighted in their journeys. The intentional cyclical flow of traffic within the installation echoes how easy it is to get stuck running in circles between informal, precarious housing options and formal supports that may not suit your needs. The audio carries the emotional component of the experience, bringing to light the internal thoughts that continue to haunt youth, even after safe housing has been attained. The lighting and props were used to help make this feel real. All details included represented material elements of the different spaces and places that were part of the youth experience.



# The Installation

## Overview of Details

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The installation was set up in Saint John, NB in an old public museum space between two rooms. The installation itself was in a space of 40feet by 32feet, with the walls of the installation being 8feet tall.

A total of 453 people attended the installation over the course of 8days.

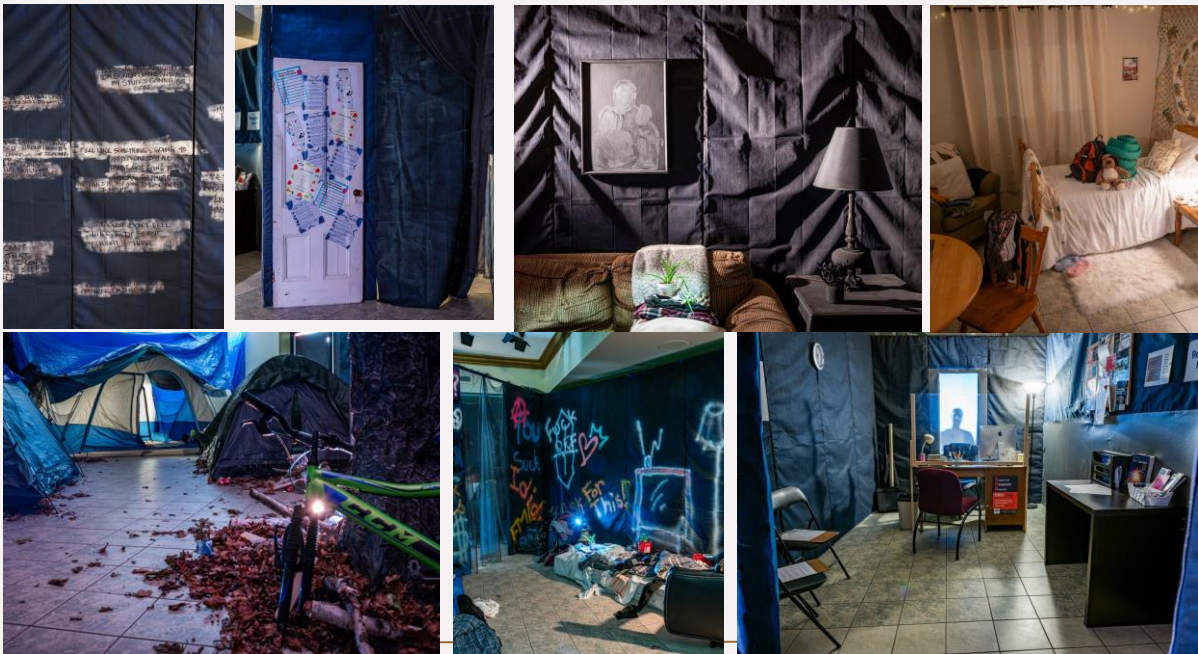


Photo Credit: Michael Mohan

# The Installation

## Overview of Details

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The second room was used as an event and debriefing space as people exited the installation itself. This is where anonymized quotes from the youth were displayed in order to respect and amplify their voices. This room was 20feet by 30feet.





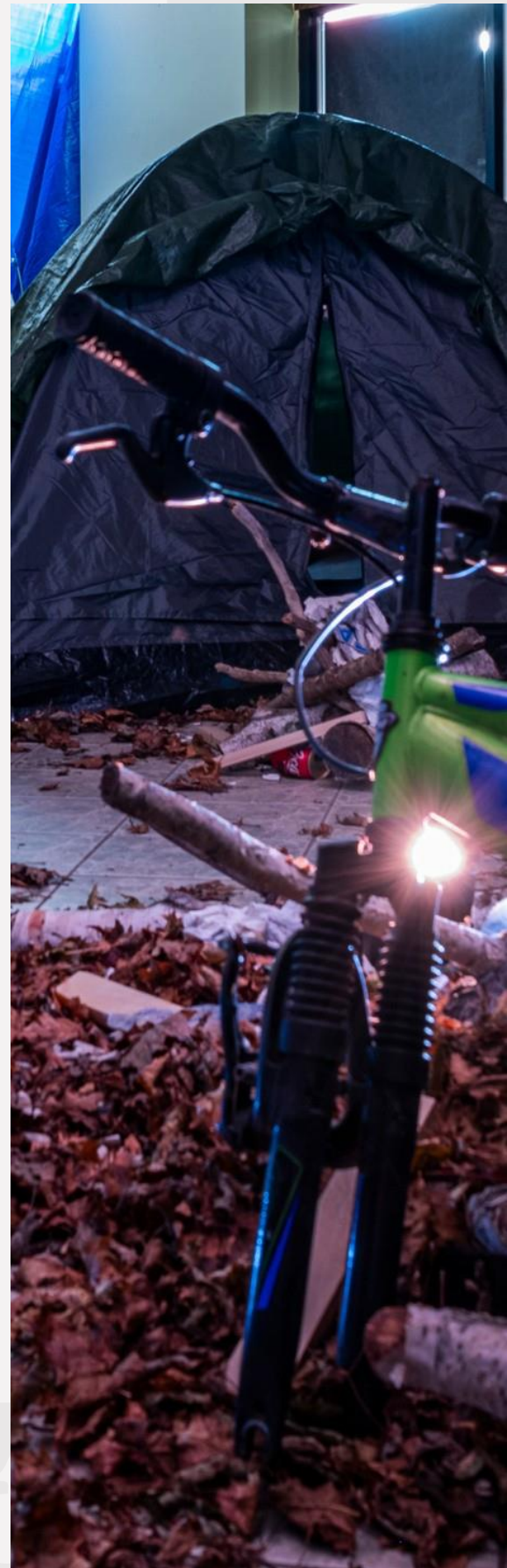
# Community Reactions

A total of 95 feedback surveys were collected and analyzed. The following summary of key findings reveals how using art as a form of social action can have an impact on reducing stigma in our communities.

## What the Experience Provided

Attendees mention feeling so much more aware and connected to the fact that youth in their own city are experiencing homelessness. Many describe their experience as “eye opening” and acknowledge a new awareness of these challenges for youth. Interestingly, the exhibit seemed to push attendees to reflect on how this relates to their own lives, suggesting that the installation was more of a reflexive experience. One attendee points to how easy it can be to disassociate yourself from the painful realities of others and how this exhibit seems to foster a connection that really moved them.

*"The exhibit was extremely moving. It is easy to go through life **not realizing the pain** others feel."*



# Community Reactions

## What the Experience Provided

*"...sometimes **we forget** that others don't have the same reality as us..."*

The emotional connection seemed to help people confront biases or stigmas in a way that made room for learning. This once again points to a reflexive experience.

*"I felt bad for **judging** these people without having any idea of what they go through or how they got to where they are."*

In addition, it seems the multi-media installation triggered an empathic response that heightened awareness of these challenges occurring in their communities.

*"I felt for the ones living through this. I felt **their emotions**"*

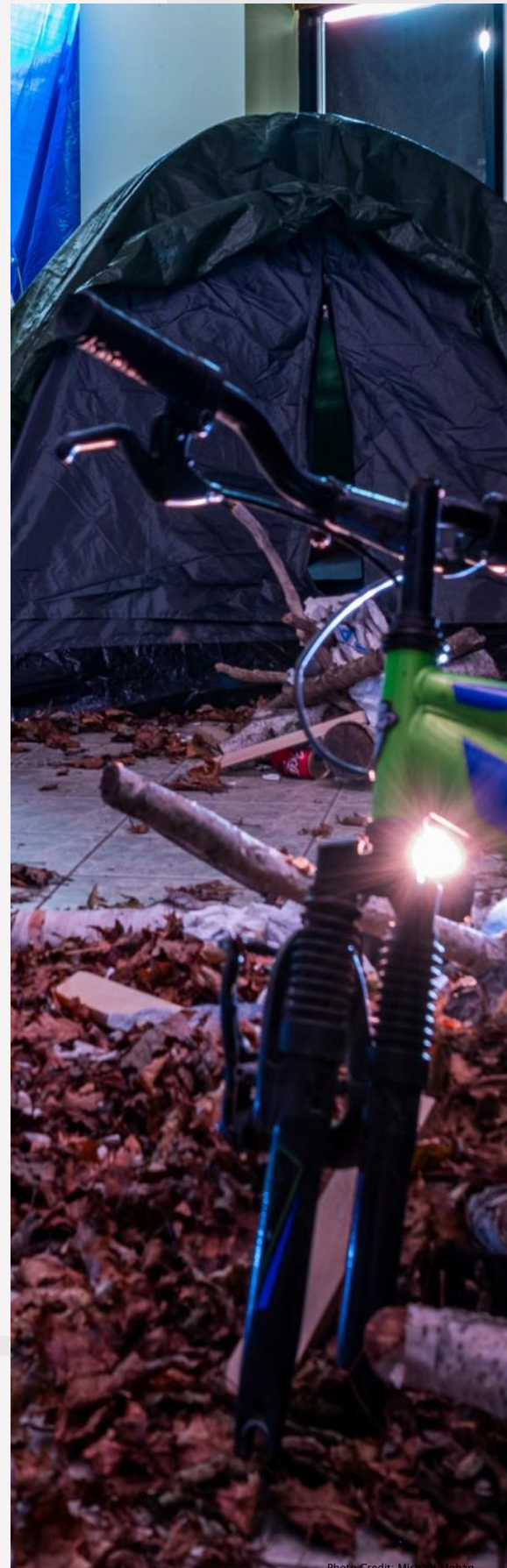


Photo Credit: Michael Mohan



# Community Reactions

## What the Experience Provided

These empathic responses are, at times, followed by a sense of duty to contribute to improvements. Attendees seem to want to do something with the emotions being felt, however may not always know how to engage in action.

*"...**Unsure of my role** in the general solution..."*

Attendees express a desire for decision makers to attend the exhibit and for more to be done to support youth in breaking homelessness cycles, including the expansion of youth programming.

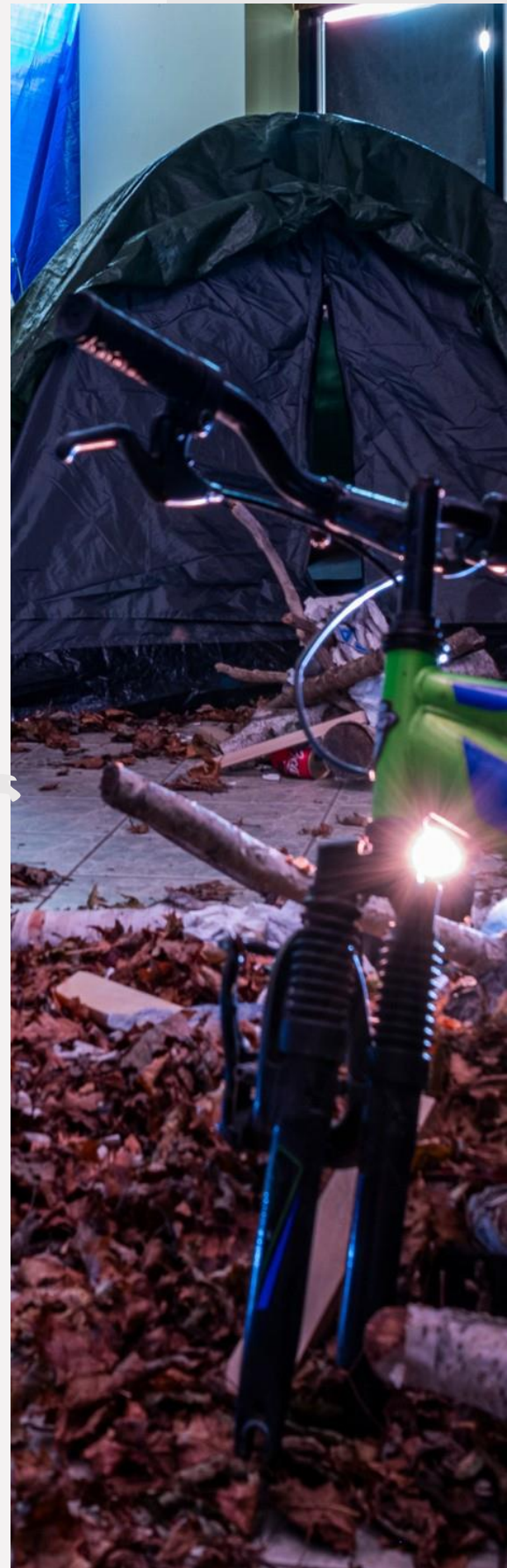


Photo Credit: Michael Mohan

# Community Reactions

## Artistic Elements and Their Impact

When asked what stood out about their experience of the installation, attendees remarked on the various artistic elements that came together to create this multi-sensory experience. This experience seems to promote a level of intimacy with the information being conveyed. It is not just about hearing something or seeing something, but about relating to the information and being able to connect who you are and how you live with the narratives being expressed all around you.

*"So incredibly **impactful**. It's one thing to see the texts or even hear the stories, but to have the opportunity to walk through and experience first hand was heartbreaking. Definitely prompted tears from me and my team"*

By utilizing art to create an experience, attendees seemed to better understand the complexity of living through many of these challenges.



Photo Credit: Michael Mohan



# Community Reactions

## Artistic Elements and Their Impact

When talking about the artistic elements that stood out to them, attendees also talk about the self-hatred that is paired with systemic trauma, how on edge youth must feel while trying to navigate these challenges, the level of mistrust that builds, the lack of safety available, and the disconnect that exists with the services trying to support youth. One attendee remarks,

*"The smell, the journaling, the reality of the dark loneliness that we expect people to heal in and the weight we put on people in these situations AND the **apathy** from those working the frontlines."*

Many attendees point to the props in the installation as part of what helps make the experience feel real,

*"I felt uneasy but it was so informative. The leaves on the ground made it feel so cold & showed **the real thing** of living outdoors."*



Photo Credit: Michael Mohan



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## Artistic Elements and Their Impact

Props also seem to help attendees reflect on information they hadn't considered previously. As one attendee remarks,

*"The school books sitting on top of a sleeping bag really caught me off guard. I had never considered that youth would be sleeping rough and attending school, and it was such a **stark realization** for me."*

The audio specifically, seemed to be a prominent aspect of much of the installation feedback. Attendees point to the audio as being an impactful and immersive part of their experience. It seemed to impact the attendees' ability to empathize with the youth narratives represented. One attendee explains,

*"I thought the sound effects were very moving, really put everything into perspective. Allowed me to be **more empathetic**, as I felt like I was walking into their shoes."*



Photo Credit: Michael Mohan

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## Artistic Elements and Their Impact

The traffic flow designed to loop you through four of the five different rooms was mentioned as a component of the experience that helped attendees understand how difficult it must be to navigate these scenarios and how much of this plays on our ability to trust our environments.

*"The part where you **don't know where to go** really stood out. I noticed a lotttt of mistrust"*

Finally, attendees seemed to appreciate having a person present at the entrance and exit to guide their experience and facilitate a meaningful reflection at the end.

*"...The person at the front desk was **very informative** prior to, during and afterwards."*



Photo Credit: Michael Mohan



# Community Reactions

## Housing As A Right

Attendee responses include comments about systemic structures working against the needs of youth.

*"[Affordable housing is] extremely limited and unavailable to many. The "system" isn't designed to protect teens."*

They acknowledge the need for programs and services to meet youth where they are at, to support their agency and need for healthy independence, and to invest in wrap-around supports that guide youth through the traumatic experiences that can have an impact even after receiving safe and stable housing. Interestingly, attendees also reinforce the notion that youth are worthy of safe and stable housing, regardless of their sobriety or past experiences. Housing as a right emerges as theme.

*"That there is a great need for safe housing that truly meets the very individual needs of youth."*



# Community Reactions

Taken all together, the responses collected from the feedback surveys convey a deeper appreciation and understanding of the experiences youth navigate while living unhoused. It seems the multi-sensory experience provided an experiential learning opportunity to the public and meaningfully impacted their awareness and perceptions of youth homelessness.



Photo Credit: Michael Mohan



# Considerations and Next Steps

## The Importance of Pivoting

Although youth expressed strong interest in being part of the BH design process, levels of engagement varied across the project. As Karabanow & Nalor (2015) acknowledge, youth may not always be able to participate in activities consistently or as planned. Although we began with facilitated workshops with youth, the team quickly realized that this platform only worked for certain youth. This is not a reflection of interest or commitment, and is often related to unpredictable events that require attention. It is for this reason that we pivoted from the original plan to capture youth input through four structured workshops, and instead set up a variety of different touchpoints where youth could provide feedback, ideas, and contribute to the build of the installation. Project activities took place at community locations where youth often attend and feel comfortable.



# Considerations and Next Steps

This made it easier for youth to make choices about what they wanted to participate in, whether it be informal chats with one of the team members, or writing their thoughts on post-its, or jumping into a team meeting and engaging with the variety of artistic mediums used to put together the installation. Each youth contributed to this installation in a way that was comfortable and meaningful to them. This flexibility also provided opportunity for multiple youth perspectives to weigh in on how the installation should represent youth housing journeys.

## Online Presence + Future Exhibits

The Building Home project understood the importance of utilizing social media and online presence to engage the public in information about youth homelessness, to create intrigue and interest in the process of building the installation, and to promote attendance at the exhibition launch event.





# Considerations and Next Steps

Content creation and design for social media promotion strategically followed Building Home branding guidelines introduced through the agency that created our website. These platforms continue to be used as a knowledge mobilization tool and will support our future exhibition events.

Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/buildinghomesj/>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/buildinghomesj>

Website:

[www.buildinghome.ca](http://www.buildinghome.ca)

Currently, we have been invited to exhibit and present this project in another three locations around the province and have also been invited to guest lecture on this project in Montreal, Qc. Next steps include a focus on publications and community reports which will be made accessible through our online platforms.



Thank you

